IMAGE OF AN INTEREST-RELATED EDUCATION TEACHER: PERSPECTIVES FROM HEADS OF EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract. This article analyses the professional and personal qualities of interest-related education teachers, their impact on students and relationships with students, based on the results of a survey of 178 heads of educational institutions. The findings reveal that most heads believe that teachers are usually accurate and timely in their actions, build good relationships with students, and are not too harsh with them. In addition, the heads of the institutions are aware of the potential problems in the learning process and are ready to address these problems. These conclusions reflect the important role of interest-related education teachers in the learning process and point to the need to further develop teachers' professional and personal qualities in order to ensure an effective learning environment and student development.

Keywords: image of a teacher, impact on students, interest-related education, teacher's professional qualities.

Introduction

The teacher is always perceived as the embodiment of morality, the ideal example for his students (Kestere, Kalke, 2018). Researchers Iveta Ķestere and Baiba Kalķe remind us that asexuality and modesty are an eternal ideal of a teacher. Sexuality and pretense have always been taboo in the teaching profession. Researching modern teachers in Latvia, researchers conclude that the image of a teacher in society changes slowly and, in many ways, corresponds to the traditional image. For example, students describe the typical teacher as modest and inconspicuous (Ķestere, Kaļķe, 2014). A modern teacher is expected to behave democratically but must also be intellectually superior to his students (Ķestere et al., 2012).

To analyse the teacher's image, the following criteria are often put forward: the teacher's gender, age, appearance, voice, mimicry, gestures, positive and negative features of the teacher's character and actions (Kaļķe, 2008; Ķestere, Kaļķe, 2014). In 2022, 39,041 teachers of general education, vocational education, preschool education, and special education worked in the Latvian education system, of which 36,218 or 92.8% were women (Centrālā statistikas pārvalde, 2023). The ideal age of a teacher, from the perspective of students, is between 30 and 50 years old (Kalķe, 2008). Among all teachers, there are 8,097

or 20.7% under the age of 34, 23,075 or 59.1% in the middle age group, and 7,869 or 20.2% seniors (60 and over) (Centrālā statistikas pārvalde, 2023). The teacher's clothing is classic – most often a suit in dark colours, shoes or boots with a low heel, accessories – glasses, a watch, a handbag. The teacher's voice is loud, calm, determined and the diction is clear. Teachers speak literary correctly, without colloquial words. Teachers express their anger with a louder, threatening voice. In non-verbal communication, the teacher uses gestures, but mimicry is characterized as revealing both positive and negative emotions (Kaļķe, 2008; Ķestere, Kaļķe, 2014; Ķestere et al., 2012).

These several perceptions helped to create an image of the general teacher in Latvia. The aim of the case study was to create an understanding of the different aspects of interest-related education by creating an image of a teacher as seen by the head of the institution. For this purpose, four perspectives of the objective image of a teacher, as described in the theoretical part, were mapped against the different aspects of the work of interest-related education teachers that can be observed and analysed by the head of the institution. The author expects that the results highlight the importance of creating a supportive and dynamic environment to enhance student learning and promote the holistic development of students in interest-related education programmes.

The Image of a Teacher

Sandra Chang-Kredl and Daniela Colannino (2017) examined social media discussions between 2009 and 2015 about the "best" and "worst" teachers, specifically using the Reddit discussion platform. The best teachers were found to know their subject matter and how to teach it, had personal qualities that were admired by students, were caring in their relationships with students, and had a lasting impact on a student's life. Four general themes emerged in the research on (Chang-Kredl, Colannino, 2017) how to represent the data more objectively:

- the teacher's professional qualities,
- the teacher's personal qualities,
- the relationship between teacher and student,
- the impact on students, namely, the consequence of the teacher's approach to the student's learning, performance, and self-confidence.

Teacher's professional qualities

Different students have different learning styles and therefore different teaching styles are needed to be effective. Indeed, some students adore a teacher who challenges them, while other students find this style intolerable. The worst teachers were unqualified, dishonest, or incompetent in their teaching skills (Chang-Kredl, Colannino, 2017). A teacher's ability to fulfil any role during the lesson is part of their professionalism. Unexpected situations in the learning

process can be noticed and used for the benefit of students. The teaching profession requires a positive attitude (Jankovska, 2010). Students highly value the professionalism of teachers and at the same time they are usually intolerant of the incompetence of adults (MacPhail et al., 1973). Teachers no longer just stand in front of students at the blackboard, they tend to walk between rows, sit among students, and work with individual groups of students (Kestere et al., 2012).

Teacher's personal qualities

Students want to see teachers as individuals with their desires, interests, and abilities (Jankovska, 2010). A study in Australia noted that among the teacher attributes offered by students who achieved the best in school, the concepts of care and trust were the most important (Lovat, 2009). The teacher's personal characteristics, often indicative of eccentricity, were interpreted in both positive and negative ways. Admired as unique, the best teachers were distinguished by their creativity, innovation and quirks that made them quite memorable. Their personal quality was linked to the professional: the students were still learning. Worse teachers had unpleasant personality traits. The worst teachers cited as unique did not have effective practices to compensate for their odd behaviour (Chang-Kredl, Colannino, 2017). The most frequently mentioned positive features of a teacher's character and actions are understanding, helpful, responsive, knowledgeable, smart, able to teach, with a sense of humour, patient, restrained, friendly, kind. As negative features – hard, harsh, tense, biased, intolerant, boring (Kalke, 2008). Teenagers expect higher standards from teachers than from themselves (MacPhail et al., 1973). The worst teachers experience mood swings throughout the day. The fatigue often observed among teachers could be the result of long hours, bureaucratic paperwork and poor pay (Kestere et al., 2012).

Relationships between teachers and students

Good teachers are those who were generally friendly and with whom students spent time outside of school. The best teachers make an extra effort to build relationships with their students. The worst teachers were careless or abusive in their relationships with students (Chang-Kredl, Colannino, 2017). If a teacher is not interested in work, the desire to work cannot be asked of students (Jankovska, 2010). Students were disappointed that teachers did not provide support when needed. The teacher should not hinder the students' discovery by talking too much, too early, too often, but it is not equivalent to adopting a permanent neutral position (MacPhail et al., 1973). A teacher's life is quite lonely, and his workday is busy, making him tired and building strained relationships with students (Kestere et al., 2013).

Impact on students

A study by MacPhail and co-authors (MacPhail et al., 1973) showed that 70% of fifteen-year-old elementary school graduates want the school to, first, provide an understanding of what determines whether performance is good or bad, and, second, help them find solutions to difficulties in relationships between people. The mission of the teacher today is similar to the mission of the past – to guide students through knowledge with life wisdom and experience (Jankovska, 2010). Bad teachers have no long-term future impact on students (Chang-Kredl, Colannino, 2017). However, in general, negative experiences at school tend to be brighter and harder to forget. Thus, memories of a typical teacher can become a common picture of the mistakes made by many teachers (Kestere et al., 2013; Ķestere et al., 2012).

The Image of a Interest-Related Education Teacher

The author conducted a survey in 2016 among the heads of institutions where interest-related education programs are provided, including questions about the professionalism and personal characteristics of interest-related education teachers. The survey used quantitative data collection methods. Secondary qualitative and quantitative data from other studies were also used.

According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia, 872 institutions provided interest-related education in the 2016/2017 school year (Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija, personal communication, July 14, 2017). Questionnaires were sent to the official emails of all institutions. The heads completed the questionnaire in Google Forms. In total, 178 heads of institutions responded. The data obtained were anonymised and further analysed in aggregated form. The author is aware that the heads of institutions can feel internal pressure when answering questions about their institution. Therefore, they may avoid or feel uncomfortable revealing sensitive information about the institution's problems.

It can be seen from Table 1 "Professional qualities of teachers of interest-related education" that the heads of institutions mostly agree with Statement 3 "Teachers regularly improve their professional competence", which is not surprising at all, because this is a legislative requirement: every practicing teacher also needs to undergo professional qualification improvement programs, the amount of which is not less than 36 hours in 3 years. (Ministru kabinets, 2018). However, a third of the heads only partially agree with this statement. Future research can reveal whether heads do not see the point of existing courses in terms of content or do not feel the results in interest-related education work. In other statements, the option "totally agree" does not reach even 50%. It is possible that for Statement 1, "Teachers work with enthusiasm," the heads mostly "partially agree" due to the above-mentioned teacher fatigue and bureaucratic elements of

work. As to Statement 4 (try a novelty in the learning process) and Statement 5 (apply a well-known thing in the learning process), 2/3 of the heads of institutions partly agreed, however, there were sharp differences in other answers: 1/3 of the heads are convinced of teachers' willingness to try new methodologies, and only 16.3% fully agree that teachers prefer known techniques. Three statements (6, 7 and 8) relate to teachers' willingness and ability to share their experiences and gain a broader vision. While 41% of the heads of institutions are convinced that their institution's teachers share good practices and experiences, only 29.2% agree that interest-related education teachers participate in methodological commissions. However, 56.2% of the heads reveal that teachers in their institutions are not involved in the European Union's teacher mobility programs.

Table 1 Professional Qualities of Interest-Related Education Teachers (made by the author)

	Statement	Value (Frequency / Percent)			
#		Disagree	Partially	Totally	
		Disagree	agree	agree	
1	Teachers work with enthusiasm	4 / 2.2	95 / 53.4	79 / 44.4	
2	Teachers appreciate academic achievements	4 / 2.2	112 / 62.9	62 / 34.8	
3	Teachers regularly improve their professional	4 / 2.2	58 / 32.6	116 / 65.2	
3	competence	4/2.2	36 / 32.0	110 / 03.2	
4	Teachers are interested in trying out new	3 / 1.7	118 / 66.3	57 / 32.0	
_	methodologies and teaching techniques	3 / 1. /	116 / 00.3	31732.0	
5	Teachers prefer known methodologies and	30 / 16.8	/ 16.8 119 / 66.9	29 / 16.3	
5	teaching techniques				
6	Teachers share good practices and experiences	9 / 5.1	96 / 53.9	73 / 41.0	
7	Teachers actively participate in the work of	17 / 9.6	109 / 61.2	52 / 29.2	
/	methodological commissions/associations	17/9.0	109 / 01.2	32 / 29.2	
8	Teachers involve in the European Union's	100 / 56.2	61 / 34.3	17 / 9.5	
0	teacher mobility programs	100 / 30.2	100 / 30.2 01 / 34.3	1//9.3	

From Table 2 it is possible to draw conclusions about some individual personal qualities of interest-related education teachers. A general Statement 9 on teachers' high moral principles was fully agreed to by almost 50% of the heads of institutions. The answer "partially agree" – here and elsewhere – may indicate problems in a certain area or that the head sees the teachers of his institution as people, rather than an idealized image of teachers. Statement 10 about teachers' sociability, loyalty to the workplace reveals that only a third of the heads of institutions are absolutely convinced that teachers voluntarily participate in the activities of the institution. Statements 11 to 13 relate to patriotism, which begins with a sense of belonging to the local place. Half of the heads strongly agree that interest-related education teachers are proud of their institution, less are willing to claim that they are proud of their city and county or their country. The survey took place before the Russian war against Ukraine, so patriotism was not in the first line.

Table 2 **Personal Qualities of Interest-Related Education Teachers** (made by the author)

	Statement	Value (Frequency / Percent)			
#		Disagree	Partially	Totally	
			agree	agree	
9	Teachers have high moral principles	3 / 1.7	92 / 51.7	83 / 46.6	
10	Teachers voluntarily participate in	8 / 4.5	102 / 57.3	68 / 38.2	
10	institution activities				
11	Teachers are proud of their institution	1 / 0.6	89 / 50.0	88 / 49.4	
12	Teachers are proud of their city or county	1 / 0.6	106 / 59.6	71 / 39.9	
13	Teachers are proud of their country	4 / 2.2	99 / 55.6	75 / 42.1	

The impact of interest-related education teachers on students (Table 3) was measured by learning objectives, as opposed to purely learning achievements, and whether they were complemented by the development of students' skills and virtues. 22.5% and 18% of institution heads are convinced that teachers are focused on maximum achievement (Statement 14) and students' knowledge and skills (Statement 15). About as many heads see that teachers apply learning standards to the level of students and their needs (Statement 16). The following goals of teachers correspond to the definition of interest-related education: the law on education defines that interest-related education ensures the implementation of a person's individual educational needs and desires, regardless of age and previously acquired education. (Saeima, 1998) In turn, 30.3% of the heads of institutions are convinced that the teachers agree that the goal of learning should be both the acquisition of skills and knowledge and the development of students' social and emotional skills (Statement 17). A third of the heads undoubtedly agree with Statement 18 that teachers of interest-related education consider that "the development of students' virtues is as important as the acquisition of their skills and knowledge in classes".

Table 3 The Impact of Interest-Related Education Teachers on Students (made by the author)

		Value (Frequency / Percent)			
#	Statement	Disagree	Partially	Totally	
		Disagree	agree	agree	
	There is a consensus among teachers that learning				
14	achievements should be kept at the highest	26 / 14.6	112 / 62.9	40 / 22.5	
	possible level				
	There is a consensus among teachers that				
15	developing students' skills and knowledge is the	21 / 11.8	124 / 69.7	33 / 18.5	
	most important task of the lessons				
	There is a consensus among teachers that it is best				
16	to adapt learning standards to the level of learners	30 / 16.8	113 / 63.5	35 / 19.7	
	and their needs				

17	There is a consensus among teachers that the development of students' social and emotional skills is as important as the acquisition of their skills and knowledge in classes	8 / 4.5	116 / 65.2	54 / 30.3
	skins and knowledge in classes			
	There is a consensus among teachers that the			
18	development of students' virtues is as important as	10 / 5 6	109 / 61.2	50 / 22 1
	development of students' virtues is as important as the acquisition of their skills and knowledge in	10 / 3.0	109/01.2	39 / 33.1
	classes			

If in the previous questions, there was an opportunity to look at the personality of interest-related education teachers through more general statements, Tables 4–7 summarize the results when the heads of institutions had to answer whether teachers are subject to certain disruptive factors. Not surprisingly, 55% of the heads agreed with Statement 19 ("Teachers teach students with different abilities in the same group") because interest-related education groups include students, regardless of their skill and ability level. However, it is unfortunate that it is perceived as a learning-hampering factor. 50% of the heads of institutions are convinced that teachers of their institutions have no difficulties when it comes to teaching students of different ethnic backgrounds in the same group (Statement 20). Latvia is a multinational country where such a situation is not uncommon, however, for a third of the heads it is a small but disruptive factor, but for 16.8% – a certain level or a very great difficulty. Only 11.2% of institution heads are distracted by teachers resisting change (Statement 21), and 39.4% believe that this problem concerns them very little. For the most part, interestrelated education teachers are prepared for their classes (Statement 22), however, 38.2% of the heads find that this interferes with the classes very little.

Table 4 Disruptive Factors: Professional Qualities of Teachers (made by the author)

		Value (Frequency / Percent)			
#	Statement	Does not concern	Concerns very little	Concerns somewhat + very much	
19	Teachers teach students with different abilities in the same group	16 / 9.0	63 / 35.4	99 / 55.6	
20	Teachers teach students of different ethnic backgrounds in the same group	90 / 50.6	58 / 32.6	30 / 16.8	
21	The institution's staff resists change	88 / 49.4	70 / 39.3	20 / 11.2	
22	Teachers are not well prepared for class	101 / 56.7	68 / 38.2	9 / 5.1	

Only two examples of teachers' personal qualities that interfere with the lessons (Table 5), which concern accuracy, are highlighted. These two things can be easily detected and observed by the heads of institutions. In Statement 23, 70.8% of the heads do not observe absenteeism of interest-related education teachers, and a quarter of them admit that this disruption has very little impact on

work. In Statement 24, 2/3 of the heads of institutions do not find delays in the start of teacher classes and 28.1% see very little difficulty in that.

Table 5 Disruptive factors: Personal Qualities of Teachers (made by the author)

		Value	Percent)	
#	Statement	Does not concern	Concerns very little	Concerns somewhat + very much
23	Teacher absenteeism	126 / 70.8	44 / 24.7	8 / 4.5
24	Teachers delay the start of classes	119 / 66.8	50 / 28.1	9 / 5.1

Two questions were used to understand the institution heads' perception of the relationship between teachers and students (Table 6). Poor student—teacher relations (Statement 25) were observed by 7.9% of the heads and 43.8% found it to be a very small problem that could interfere with classes. The fact that interest-related education teachers treat students too harshly (Statement 26) was found by only a few heads of institutions and is indicated by 47.8% of respondents as a very small problem.

Table 6 Disruptive Factors: The Relationship Between Teacher and Students (made by the author)

		Value (Frequency / Percent)			
#	Statement	Does not concern	Concerns very little	Concerns somewhat + very much	
25	Poor student-teacher relationship	86 / 48.3	78 / 43.8	14 / 7.9	
26	Teachers treat students too harshly	85 / 47.8	85 / 47.8	8 / 4.5	

Disruptive factors that may impact students are summarized in Table 7. Approximately half of the heads believe that Statements 27 to 29 do not apply to their institution, and yet more than a tenth of the surveyed heads of institutions admitted that each of the factors is to some extent and very disruptive. About 40% of the heads admitted that in very rare cases interest-related education teachers do not respect the individual needs of students and also have little expectation from their students, 34.8% – assume that it is rare, but there are situations when students are not encouraged to develop their higher abilities.

		Value (Frequency / Percent)			
#	Statement	Does not concern	Concerns very little	Concerns somewhat + very much	
27	Teachers disregard students' individual needs	86 / 48.3	74 / 41.6	18 / 10.1	
28	Students are not encouraged to develop their maximum abilities	97 / 54.5	62 / 34.8	19 / 10.7	
29	Teachers expect little from students	87 / 48.9	71 / 39.9	20 / 11.2	

Table 7 Disruptive Factors: Impact on Students (made by the author)

It can be summarised that despite indications of teachers fatigue and bureaucratic hurdles, there's a notable inclination among teachers to embrace novelty in teaching methodologies, albeit with varying degrees of enthusiasm. This suggests a potential for innovative teaching approaches within interest-related education. However, the research also highlights challenges such as limited participation in the European Union teachers mobility programs, indicating a need for greater support and incentives to encourage broader professional engagement among teachers. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of teachers' personal qualities, such as moral principles and sociability, in shaping class dynamics and student-teacher relationships within interest-related education settings.

Conclusions

The image of a teacher in Latvia is traditional and conservative, where there is an idea of the teacher as the embodiment of morality and a model for students. The majority of teachers are female, and the ideal age from the perspective of the students is between 30 and 50 years. The teacher's appearance and behaviour are important criteria for assessing the teacher's image. Classical clothing, calm and definite voice, and non-verbal communication, such as gestures and mimics, impact students' perception of the teacher and their authority and competence.

The professional qualities of the teacher are essential for an effective learning process. Good teachers are those who can adapt to the learning styles of different students, are competent in their teaching skills and have a positive attitude. Teacher's personal qualities, such as care and trust, creativity, and humour, can have a positive impact on students' attitudes and successful learning outcomes. The teacher's eccentricity can be seen as both attractive and uncomfortable, depending on how these qualities are commensurate with the learning process and students' willingness to learn. The relationship between teacher and student is important both for the effectiveness of the learning process and for students' emotional well-being. Good teachers are those who care about their relationships with students, offer support, and use extra effort to create a supportive and open

environment. The impact of the teacher on students can be significant, especially in terms of how they develop and learn to understand and solve problems. Good teachers who promote understanding and wisdom in life can provide a lasting positive impact, while worse teachers can create negative associations with the school and learning process.

The institution heads generally agree that interest-related education teachers regularly improve their professional competence. However, a third of them only partially agree with this statement. This indicates that there may be inconsistencies or dissatisfaction with existing courses or their results in interest-related education. The heads show an average level of approval for various statements about the professional qualities of interest-related education teachers, which may indicate that they may be concerned about certain elements of teachers' work. Although some of the responses from the heads of institutions show the willingness and opportunities of teachers to share their experiences and try new methods in the learning process, it is evident that the majority of the heads point to the weak involvement of teachers in the European Union's teacher mobility programs and methodological commissions. This points to a potential problem with the professionalism and improvement of teacher work.

The heads' responses about the personal qualities of interest-related education teachers, such as high moral principles and sociability, suggest that some institution heads realistically see their teachers. This may also indicate that there may be various problems in the real context of the school environment. Heads' responses about teachers' participation in institutional events and their pride in their institution, city, county, or country suggest that this may affect their motivation and their relationships with students.

The responses of the heads of institutions about the goals of teachers in interest-related education show that some teachers strive for maximum learning achievements and the development of students' skills, while others also emphasize the importance of social and emotional skills. This indicates different priorities and approaches in the work of teachers, which could depend on the philosophy and needs of the particular teachers. Heads' support for the statement that the development of students' virtues is as important to teachers as the acquisition of their skills and knowledge in classes suggests a possible tendency to pay more attention to the comprehensive development and well-being of students than to academic achievement alone.

The heads' responses to disruptive factors, such as teaching diversity and resistance to change, suggest the need to improve the teaching process to support interest-related education teachers and ensure successful learning outcomes for all learners. Although most heads of institutions believe that teachers are prepared for their classes and have no difficulty in teaching students of different ethnic backgrounds, there is still a small percentage who find this situation disruptive. This could indicate the need for further measures to promote intercultural

understanding and adapt the learning process to different groups of students. Most heads do not indicate the absenteeism of interest-related teachers or the delay of the start of classes as a disruptive factor that would affect the course of classes. Teachers are usually accurate and timely in their actions, which facilitates the flow of the learning process. Institution heads generally believe that interest-related education teachers have a good relationship with students, and most believe that teachers are not too harsh with students. Teachers usually build good relationships with their group of students and try to be open and understanding.

Disturbing factors that can impact students are considered rare, but still disruptive. Institution heads are aware of the potential problems that may arise in the learning process and are prepared to address them in order to provide an effective learning environment.

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